

**Remarks Prepared for
Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D.
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
For the
AASHTO Safety Leadership Forum II
Galloway, New Jersey
May 8, 2005**

Slide # 1 Title Slide

- Thank you, Jack for that introduction.

[Jack Lettiere, President, AASHTO]

- And thank you for a second invitation to speak with you.
- Today, I am representing all the Department of Transportation surface transportation administrations that have collectively undertaken efforts to keep our highway system safe and secure.
- You and your colleagues in state and local government have joined us in these efforts.

Slide # 2 Bush/Mineta

- It is an honor to be a part of President Bush's Administration, who often reminds his appointees "good policy makes good politics." For my part, I also believe that good science and data makes good policy.
- At NHTSA, we have thoroughly reviewed the data to identify areas where we can effectively apply our resources to save the most lives. The data breaks down into three opportunities: Get more people to buckle up, reduce impaired driving, and invest in safety across the board.
- FHWA and FMCSA are also data-driven and focus on program areas, which will save the most lives in a cost effective fashion.
- Today, I would like to discuss three topics: the leadership challenge ahead, how the three agencies working together with you can address them, and how re-authorization of our safety program will support our ability to address our safety goal.

Slide # 3 Leadership

- I want to take a moment to address the importance of leadership in highway safety.

- We, in this room, collectively represent national highway safety leadership. We must fully accept responsibility for improving safety.
- We also share this leadership responsibility with many others who must engage in our programs. Good intentions are not enough.
- We must recognize and convey to others, particularly decision-makers, the sense of urgency for action if we are to make genuine and sustained progress in reducing the death toll on our highways.
- While the fatality rate has decreased over the past two decades, the number of Americans dying each year has remained between 40,000 and 43,000 sons, daughters, dads, and - even more sadly on this day, mothers.
- The status quo approach to safety is yielding only limited success because it has only limited potential.
- Improved highway safety requires that we expand our traditional methodologies, and take a more comprehensive approach.
- If America is to have the safest highway system in the world, we as leaders must make that happen.
- I want to acknowledge your efforts, as AASHTO's Board of Directors are considering resolutions, which show the leadership necessary to meet this challenge. The primary belt resolution, the safety priority resolution and the safety plan resolution are clear, progressive steps.

Slide # 4 Motor Vehicle Deaths

- We're still compiling final data for 2004 but our projections show that overall motor vehicle fatalities increased slightly to 42,800.
- According to these 2004 projections, we experienced the fewest injuries recorded, since we started keeping track of them in 1988.
- According to the projections, passenger car occupant fatalities have declined, although motorcycle fatalities have increased, which is a big part of the overall increase. Since 1997, motorcycle fatalities have increased an astonishing 85%.
- We know where motor vehicle fatalities are occurring:
 - 59% involve roadway departure
 - 22% occur at or near intersections
 - 11% involve pedestrian deaths

Slide # 5 Motor Vehicle Fatalities: Lowest Rate in Recorded History

- This slide shows the trend in the traffic fatality rate, which accounts for the yearly increase in exposure. The traffic fatality rate is the lowest since DOT started keeping records 29 years ago.
- Secretary Mineta, FHWA Administrator Peters and FMCSA Administrator Sandberg and everybody at DOT share a commitment to lower the fatality rate to 1.0 per 100 million VMT by 2008.
- To meet this challenge, things must change. We must work smarter, and approach safety issues with innovation.
- We are ready for this challenge, and look forward to collaborating with AASHTO, GHSA, AAMVA, IACP and CVSA to address our national epidemic of highway crash injuries and fatalities.

[AASHTO, GHSA & AAMVA have formally adopted this goal]

- Your support for this national goal will help make a difference in moving the numbers downward.

Slide # 6 Top 10 Leading Causes of Death

- I know AASHTO has committed to saving lives on America's roads and highways.
- This is an area where real progress can be demonstrated to our people, as it is the leading cause of death for Americans age 3 to 33.

Slide # 7 Safety Belt Use Rates 1983-2004

- Belt use across the nation has reached 80% - a record high. This would not have been possible without the commitment of your States to enact and enforce safety belt laws.
- However, a recent study by FMCSA showed that only 48 percent of truck and bus drivers buckle up.
- Belt use among teenagers and young people (ages 16-24) is behind the national average by 3 percentage points. And in the South, teen belt use lags behind the national average by 22 percentage points.
- A compelling reason for adopting primary laws is teen belt use is 68% in states with secondary belt law compared to 80% in primary belt law states.
- Each 1% increase in the national safety belt use rate saves 270 lives, and over \$800 million in economic costs would be saved.

Slide # 8 Lives Saved By Vehicle Safety Technologies 1960 – 2002

- Earlier this year, we released a study, which found that safety technologies have saved nearly 329,000 lives between 1960 and 2002.
- One safety technology was responsible for more than half of those lives saved – safety belts.
- Safety belts cut the risk of death in a severe crash in half. Most passenger vehicle occupants killed in motor vehicle crashes are unrestrained.
- But, the belt must be worn to be effective.

Slide # 9 State Safety Belt Laws 2004

- Since I spoke to you last, just one more state, Tennessee has upgraded to a primary safety belt law.
- On the legislative front this year we hope that more states will upgrade their belt laws. States that look possible include Alaska, Missouri, Maine, and South Carolina.
- I encourage you to support enactment of primary belt laws. If belt use were to increase to 90 percent, an additional 2,800 lives would be saved each year.
- Primary laws are easier to enforce and carry the message that belt use is just as important as other traffic laws.
- Only 21 states plus DC and Puerto Rico have primary laws.
- To distinguish from the teen number earlier, overall belt use in these 21 states averages 84%, 11 points higher than secondary law states.

Slide # 10 CIOT Logo

- In two weeks, the *Click It or Ticket* high visibility safety belt enforcement campaign will kick off.
- Starting May 23 and running through June 5 police agencies across the country will be enforcing seat belt laws.
- If you watch or listen to sports programming or programming targeting 18 to 34 males, you'll see and hear the ads that support the enforcement efforts.
- While we've continued to make progress in increasing belt use, the resistant and chronic non belt-use population will be harder to reach.

- These are the riskiest drivers: those most likely to speed and drive drunk.
- Our experience shows that what changes motorists' behavior more than anything else is the threat of receiving a ticket.
- In an effort to increase safety belt use in truck drivers, FMCSA's initiative brings together law enforcement and the trucking industry in a Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Belt Partnership.
- In 2003, nearly 5,000 deaths were related to commercial motor vehicles, including 620 truckers; almost 80 percent of the 171 truck drivers who were ejected from their trucks were not wearing safety belts.
- Last month the Partnership launched an outreach campaign with the new theme: "Be ready. Be buckled."

Slide # 11 Alcohol-Related Fatalities

- As more people are buckling up, fewer people are driving impaired.
- Between 2003–2004, the number of alcohol-related fatalities dropped by more than 2% to 16,654, according to 2004 projections.
- There were reductions in alcohol-related fatalities both in the higher and lower BAC levels.
- Sadly, nearly 1/3 of young drivers (ages 15-20) killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2003 had been drinking.
- And 25% of those young drivers (ages 15-20) who were killed in crashes had a blood alcohol of .08 or higher.
- To make matters worse, of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 74% were unrestrained
- Our strategy of high visibility enforcement combined with DWI courts, special prosecutors and treatment is key to effectively reach this population.

[Wendy Hamilton of MADD is the Keynote speaker at the conference and her term expires at the end of June. You might want to acknowledge her efforts]

Slide # 12 15 Strategic Evaluation States

- We recommend that States put their energies where their problems lie. That is what we are doing from the national level.
- We are working with a group of States that are getting extra attention because they have particularly severe impaired driving problems. We believe that improving the numbers in these States is the best way to move the needle nationally.
- We started working with 13 Strategic Evaluation States, or SES states, in 2003, reinforcing their participation in the national *You Drink & Drive. You Lose* campaign by providing extra paid media, technical assistance, and enforcement operations support.
- These States are making progress. In 2003, all 13 states reduced their alcohol-related fatality rates.
- And while the number of national alcohol-related fatalities dropped 3 percent from 2002 to 2003, 11 of the 13 States led the change with reductions that were even greater than the national average.
- This year we added 2 more high-risk States - Missouri and South Carolina.
- The national impaired driving crackdown, *You Drink & Drive. You Lose.*, is August 19 – September 5. This year will also focus on impaired motorcyclists as part of the crackdown.
- Our ability to address the issue has been significantly strengthened since I spoke to you last time. Colorado, Delaware, and Minnesota have joined the rest of the states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico in adopting .08 blood alcohol laws.
- If your State has been fully engaged in *You Drink and Drive. You Lose.* and/or *Click It or Ticket*, I want to thank you and encourage you to promote their benefits to your peers. If you haven't been engaged, I ask that you join us this year. I don't know of anything you could do that would save more lives.

Slide # 13 Your Data Saves Lives

- Improving data is an important safety priority. Good data are essential to good policy and to our mission of saving lives. It is the backbone of our research, problem identification, program management and evaluation.

- Virtually all DOT analyses, research and publications rely, in whole or in part, on the data in your Police Accident Reports.
- At the Federal level, the Data IPT recommended that a Federal DOT Traffic Records Coordinating Committee be created.
- Formed in October 2004, the committee includes representatives from NHTSA, FMCSA, FHWA, RITA and the Secretary's office.
- A policy statement about traffic record systems is being formulated so that every level and branch of government knows where DOT stands on data.
- A website which will act as a clearinghouse of data is being created.
- A comprehensive listing of all DOT funding sources for traffic safety data improvement will be available.
- The faster data is collected and transmitted, the more useful it becomes. The data is important not only to DOT agencies but also to the states, local jurisdictions. Several States already have Traffic Records Coordinating Committees; however, we need them to be functional and empowered.
- It helps everyone, your planners, engineers, the medical community, and especially your police officers to identify problems, evaluate trends, and develop countermeasures strategies to reduce crashes.

Slide # 14 Comprehensive Strategic Highway Safety Plans

- FHWA, FMCSA and NHTSA have put our collective efforts behind a new approach to solve highway safety problems – the Comprehensive Strategic Highway Safety Plan. This is the safety centerpiece in reauthorization. Many of you are already moving in this direction.
- The plan is comprehensive and addresses the **4Es** of Safety – Engineering, Education, Enforcement and Emergency Services. It will cover all public roads.
- The plan is data-driven so as to address State and local needs.
- The plan is based on a collaborative process – State DOTs, SHSOs, State Police, Motor Vehicle Administrators, EMS, and all other safety stakeholders.
- 2 years ago, only a handful of States were developing Comprehensive Highway Safety Plans. Today, over half of the States are aggressively tackling the Safety problems through a comprehensive approach.

Slide # 15 Synthesis

- Our highway safety grants, under re-authorization, reflect a different approach to addressing the Nation's substantial highway safety problems.
- While formulating the Department's re-authorization proposal, the three Agencies embraced the guiding principle that States should receive resources to address their own unique transportation safety issues.
- States should be strongly encouraged to increase their safety belt use rates—the single most effective means of decreasing deaths and injuries—and should be rewarded for performance with increased funds and greater flexibility to spend those funds on either infrastructure safety or behavioral safety programs.
- But with flexibility comes accountability. States will be held accountable for setting realistic and appropriate performance goals, devising corresponding plans and ultimately achieving safety goals.
- These guiding principles of flexibility and accountability underlie all aspects of the Administration's highway safety re-authorization proposal and we are hopeful that this feature will remain in the final bill.

Slide # 16 Reauthorization Incentives

- The Administration's SAFETEA proposal builds on the tremendous successes of previous surface transportation legislation by taking some important next steps.
- I'd like to highlight several important components of this proposal that create a strong incentive for States to support re-authorization.
- The bill more than doubles funds for infrastructure safety from \$3.9 billion in TEA-21 to \$8.6 billion.
- It establishes a new "core" highway safety program built on State data-driven planning
- It encourages States to create Comprehensive Strategic Highway Safety Plans
- SAFETEA re-authorization also includes an annual \$100 million primary safety belt law incentive program that would provide flexible grant funds both to States that have already enacted these laws and to those that either enact primary laws or achieve 90 percent belt use for two consecutive years, in the future. The Senate is considering a similar provision.

- Primary laws save States money by increasing belt use, resulting in lower crash costs. Primary belt laws can earn States money for their lifesaving efforts.
- The administration is also asking Congress for \$50 million annually to help States with faster data collection and improved data quality.

Slide # 17 Top Level Leadership

- We at the U.S. Department of Transportation are committed to assisting you in the development and implementation of your comprehensive highway safety plans.
- The safety challenge calls for personal commitment to action by State DOT leadership. You, in this room, can make that happen.
- Leadership will entail:
 - Establishing Trust - Reaching out and establishing relations with key partners.
 - Raising Awareness- Helping the public understand the significance of safety.
 - Develop Plan - Good business to set achievable goals and define strategies
 - Accountability - States need to be accountable. The public needs to understand that revenue they provide is invested wisely in effective measures.
 - Build Upon Success - Look for opportunities to build upon success in key strategy areas.

Slide # 18 NHTSA, FHWA, FMCSA Logo

- I have described the magnitude of the traffic safety problem and some of our efforts to combat it.
- Your States and your agencies play a pivotal role in helping advance these efforts and we at DOT and NHTSA are ready to help you accomplish your mission.
- As I noted earlier; we collectively represent national highway safety leadership; and I believe we must fully accept the responsibility for improving safety.
- We must accept personal responsibility, and convey to others the sense of urgency for action if we are to make genuine and sustained progress in reducing the death toll on our highways.
- We need your help, and I believe we can count on you.